

The Action Chaplain from Yale

CPYRGHT By Jim Hoagland
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THE REV. WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN JR. crashed through the filmy curtain of water spray and October sun draped in front of Union Station's splashing fountain. Cars slammed to a halt as a policeman waved Mr. Coffin and the 250 persons marching behind him across the street.

The husky, athletic-looking chaplain of Yale University was going to the Justice Department to announce that he was going to break the law—that he would break it until he was arrested or until the United States pulled out of Vietnam. He was, in the words of a young activist following him, "putting his body on the line."

On the steps of the Justice Department, where he vowed to "aid and abet" young men who resist the draft, Mr. Coffin introduced himself as "in more normal moments, the chaplain at Yale University."

Charismatic Figure

BUT "NORMAL MOMENTS" have been rare in the career of this handsome, 43-year-old cleric. Long a rebel in the eyes of many of his peers, Mr. Coffin has become, since February, an outspoken advocate of draft resistance.

He is, to some observers, the most charismatic figure to emerge this year in the splintered opposition to the war in Vietnam. He has the vitality and "cool" to relate to the young, as the titular peace leaders cannot, and has impeccable establishment credentials that make his dissent and frustration over the war difficult to dismiss.

Many of the youths marching behind Mr. Coffin would have been surprised to learn that he was an Army captain and paratrooper in World War II and worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for three years as a specialist on the Soviet Union.

The son of a successful New York executive who was also the president of the trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mr. Coffin's education was predictably "Eastern Establishment"—Phillips Academy, Andover, and Yale. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1956.

It is the kind of background that led a Yale professor to remark, in 1961, when Mr. Coffin was arrested in the first Freedom Ride on Montgomery,

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Ala.: "We expect him eventually to mellow."

Mr. Coffin's critics on the faculty no longer harbor such hopes. He has consistently staked out positions more radical than his peers, then moved on to new stances when his once controversial views become more widely accepted.

Indeed, there was little in his post-CIA background to give them hopes in the first place. His attack on fraterni-

nities at Williams College as "un-Christian" when he was chaplain there in 1958 (two students fired a shotgun blast into his house during that controversy) and his early and militant involvement in civil rights are cases in point.

Now, however, the Minister is riding the crest of a cause that to millions of Americans is not merely technically illegal but also morally repugnant.

Conceding that his outspokenness has brought him under fire from Yale alumini, Mr. Coffin said recently that "too many people want a chaplain to be a nice guy, but not a good man."

"How can you be dedicated to educating conscientious young men, and then not stand by them... when they make a moral decision not to participate in an immoral and illegal war?"

"The peace movement is broadening its base. More and more students are deciding to be radical in their commitment, not in their views... We cannot shield them, but we can expose ourselves to the same dangers."

Even If It Means Jail

IN THE MARCH ISSUE of the Yale Alumni magazine, Mr. Coffin dealt with the same subject on a more personal level. But he believes that what

is happening to him is happening to the peace movement generally.

He said that after "writing letters, signing petitions, attending rallies, standing in silent vigils... many times and for years, does [a chaplain] tuck his conscience into bed with the comforting thought, 'Well, I have done my best, the President continues to escalate the war, and the law of the land is clear'?"

"Or does he decide that having chosen the road of protest he has to choose to pursue it to the end, even if this means going to jail?"

Mr. Coffin answered his question on Oct. 20 in front of the Justice Department. Aiding and abetting draft resisters is a felony, with a maximum penalty of \$10,000 fine and five years in jail. He signed a statement that he had "aided and abetted," and would continue to do it.

Mr. Coffin's stand has not caused him problems with Yale's administration. "They understand freedom of speech at Yale," he says.

From the students, who have watched him ride around the campus on a motorscooter with a pipe clenched between his teeth, there is wide admiration of his "bulldozing" manner.

After last weekend's peace demonstrations, he returned to his comfortable yellow house in New Haven, where he spends much time gardening and playing the piano. His wife should be able to give him good pointers on the latter hobby. Her father is Arthur Rubinstein.

Original filed in P. Hoagland

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